

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**  
**H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM**  
**ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

**February 23, 2017**

*Cheri Bragg, Portland, CT*

Good afternoon/evening Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg. I am a Board member of the **CT Legal Rights Project (CLRP)** and registered voter in the town of Portland. I am here to testify on **H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

The Governor's budget includes a proposal to "Fund Legal Services at Consent Decree Level" which would mean a cut of \$416,000 each of the next two fiscal years (annualizing the cut CLRP already had for FY 17, plus an additional \$388K each year). That cut is the money that CLRP uses to provide representation to clients in housing cases. The Consent Decree money is used to represent clients who are inpatients in the state operated facilities (CVH, Connecticut Mental Health Center in New Haven, and Greater Bridgeport Community Mental Health Center).

Having professionally worked in the mental health field for 15+ years, I can tell you that **there is no basic need harder to provide for than housing.** I can direct you to food pantries and assist in applying for food benefits. I can direct you to clothing vouchers, local soup kitchens, local churches, etc. I can direct you to temporary shelter and housing programs through "211". But unless you fit into very specific categories, housing, unlike food and clothing, is often NOT a quick nor easy fix. **Preventing homelessness in the first place, as CLRP's housing services do, is much quicker, much better for people and much more cost-effective for CT's budget.**

CLRP assists 550+ people each year with housing matters. I am told that this budget cut would mean laying off half of existing CLRP staff. This would mean eliminating the cost-effective CLRP services that would otherwise help prevent 550+ people from becoming homeless each year. **Increasing homelessness and the related costs of hospitalizations, etc. is NOT cost-effective budgeting.**

I have had the personal fortune of having a family member who was represented by CLRP in the past. Their representation was top notch. Professional. Efficient. Critically needed. CLRP staff already do amazing work to try to meet the ever-increasing demand for their services. This cut would likely leave CLRP unable to deliver legal services in the area of housing, as well as education and employment discrimination, due to lack of available staff. This is not a one-time cut. This cut will continue to bleed unless you put a stop to it. I urge the committee to reinstate the money for DMHAS legal services. Thank you for your time.